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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ROME 000724

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IT](#)
SUBJECT: ITALIAN LEFT LEADER: BRIDGE TO WASHINGTON IS
BRUSSELS

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Classified By: Ambassador Ronald P. Spogli, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

1. (C) A prominent Italian center-left leader says it's time for European states to realize the days of individual state relations with the US are over. Massimo D'Alema, president of the Democrats of the Left (DS), Italy's largest center-left party, said transatlantic relations remain important. Europe and the US have much to cooperate on and NATO is an essential instrument of that collaboration. But the bridge to Washington is through Brussels. End summary.

Center Left Views Ties with US through Euro-Lens

2. (U) Massimo D'Alema, president of the Democrats of the Left, Italy's largest center-left party, told a lecture audience February 22 that Europe and the United States had drifted apart in recent years, more than at any time in the post-World War II period. Still, cooperation between the US and Europe remained vital to advance the common interests and democratic values that both share. NATO is an essential instrument of that collaboration. But Europe, he said, was too wedded to the idea of "soft power" while the US had been inclined too quickly to "hard power". Better cooperation between the two sides was needed to produce more effective multilateralism.

3. (U) D'Alema said there were preconditions for such cooperation. Europe had to realize that the days of individual state relations with the US are over. The bridge to Washington is through Brussels. The sooner the UK, France and Germany realize this is in their interest, the better. The Center Left in Italy believes relations with the US should be viewed through the lens of the country's European obligations.

Little Difference Between Left and Right on Iraq

4. (C) On February 23, Ambassador followed up privately with D'Alema. Ambassador emphasized the importance of maintaining strong US-GOI bilateral relations. We had strong cooperation on many levels, a recent example being the Olympics and counter-terrorism.

5. (C) The DS president repeated the theme of individual

states coordinating with the US through Brussels. But he maintained this was not at all incompatible with strong relations with the United States. Ambassador told D'Alema that, whatever the left's disagreements with the Berlusconi government, it was undeniable that he had raised Italy's profile and voice in international affairs. Italy had an important role to play in many different areas; the Middle East, notably, was in its back yard.

¶6. (C) D'Alema agreed. The differences between right and left on Iraq, he said, had narrowed very substantially. When the Ambassador noted the Center Left's program conspicuously omitted mention of coordinating with other allies before making troop adjustments, D'Alema dismissed this, saying "of course we'll talk to you. We need to make this work". On the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis, he voiced support for a two-state solution, but said Israel was annexing territory and doing "irrevocable things" that could be a real impediment to finding a solution.

Fassino Likely Foreign Minister

¶7. (C) Ambassador asked D'Alema, a former prime minister, what he would aspire to do in government in the event of a change. The DS leader immediately knocked down speculation that he wanted to be foreign minister. He said that if DS party secretary Piero Fassino wanted the foreign ministry, it was his to have. He said the center-left realized that the US would find Fassino easier to deal with than him, "and that's not lost on us".

Comment

¶8. (C) D'Alema is smart, but more prickly and dogmatic than

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other center-left leaders. He recognized this himself with his comment that US would find Fassino more congenial as foreign minister. His comments about the road to Washington leading through Brussels are consistent with the Center Left's program, which is heavy on coordination with Europe and light on references to NATO and transatlantic cooperation. As others in his coalition have done, D'Alema tried to strike a moderate tone, well aware that Washington is already apprehensive about what policy changes a Center Left government might bring. But his ideological defaults as a former Communist were never far from the surface. On the Middle East conflict, for example, he started out in fairly standard fashion, but before long had fallen into a well-worn groove of criticism of Israel. End Comment.

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